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C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 04272

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SUBJECT: SPAIN RECALLS AMBASSADOR FROM LIBYA IN
- RESPONSE TO QADHAFI'S THREATS

REF: A) MADRID 3838, B) MADRID 3703

1. (U) THE SPANISH GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED APRIL 10 THAT IT IS "RECALLING" ITS AMBASSADOR TO TRIPOLI FOLLOWING QADHAFI'S RENEWED THREAT THE DAY BEFORE TO ATTACK U.S. FACILITIES IN SPAIN.

2. (C) THE MFA DESK OFFICER FOR LIBYA, JOSE MARIA VALDEMORO, TELLS US THAT AMB. PEIDRO WAS IN FACT ALREADY HERE ON VACATION WHEN THE DECISION TO RECALL HIM WAS TAKEN. MFA WILL RETAIN HIM "A FEW EXTRA DAYS" TO DRIVE HOME ITS MESSAGE. NO DECISION HAS BEEN TAKEN ON WHEN HE MAY RETURN TO LIBYA. IN THE ABSENCE OF LIBYAN CHARGE NAKAA, THE MINISTRY CONVOKED THE PEOPLES' BUREAU'S NUMBER TWO ON APRIL 9 TO RECEIVE A PROTEST. IN REJECTING QADHAFI'S THREATS, MFA NOTED THAT U.S. FACILITIES IN SPAIN ARE GOVERNED BY A BILATERAL ACCORD WHICH WOULD PREVENT THEIR USE AGAINST LIBYA. THE LIBYAN DIPLOMAT RESPONDED THAT HIS COUNTRY HAS EXPERIENCE OF U.S. BASES FROM KING IDRIS' DAYS; THE U.S. DID NOT ASK PERMISSION FOR PROHIBITED MISSIONS THEN AND WOULD NOT DO SO IN THE CASE OF SPAIN. THE PEOPLES' BUREAU PRESS SPOKESMAN HAS TRIED TO DOWNPLAY QADHAFI'S THREATS, INSISTING THAT THEY ARE DIRECTED AGAINST AMERICAN BASES AND NOT SPANIARDS. THIS LINE HAS NOT PROVED CONVINCING, HOWEVER, SINCE REPORTERS HAVE NOTED THAT GOS FORCES SHARE THE BASES USED BY THE UNITED STATES.

3. (C) COMMENT. THE TIMING OF QADHAFI'S RENEWED THREAT WAS SOMETHING OF A PERSONAL EMBARRASSMENT FOR FOREIGN MINISTER ORDONEZ. THE LATTER HAD APPEARED IN CTFGRESS THAT SAME DAY TO ANSWER AN INTERPELLATION ABOUT THE LIBYAN MENACE TO SPAIN. ORDONEZ REPORTED THAT THE LIBYAN CHARGE HAD EXPRESSED REGRET OVER AN EARLIER QADHAFI THREAT, WHICH THE CHARGE ALLEGED HAD BEEN DISTORTED, OVERPLAYED AND TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT. THIS EPISODE HAS AGAIN DRIVEN HOME TO THE SPANISH THAT QADHAFI IS MERCURIAL AND HIS GOVERNMENT'S ASSURANCES ARE UNRELIABLE. THAT IS NOT TO SAY, HOWEVER, THAT THE SPANISH HAVE CONCLUDED THE ONLY WAY TO DEAL WITH QADHAFI IS TO CONFRONT HIM. THE PREVAILING ATTITUDE STILL SEEMS TO BE THAT IT IS BEST NOT TO ATTRACT QADHAFI'S ANGER.

ENDERS